

Policy document for the strategic development of
The Manchester Museum

***POLICY ON HUMAN
REMAINS***

Endorsed by: The University of Manchester Senior Executive Team

Date for review: June 2010

Policy Statement

This policy is the result of a rigorous public consultation process in which archaeologists, museum professionals, academics, scientists, heritage and faith-based organisations and the Museum's Community Advisory Panel all had the opportunity to comment on an earlier draft. All responses were read and taken into consideration, and either incorporated into the policy itself, or, in this policy statement, we explain the rationale for our views.

The Manchester Museum recognizes the value of human remains in museums for learning about past peoples – treated appropriately and respectfully, the inclusion of human remains in research, educational and display programmes can be a positive benefit to a wide range of audiences.

We are fully aware that the resulting policy goes beyond the recommendations of the DCMS guidelines (*Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums*, published in 2005) and there are good reasons for this. There is growing interest in the fate of human remains among many communities. What are valued as human remains in many communities go beyond the strict scientific definition contained in the DCMS guidelines and we believe that any consultation should be extended to include those alternative views.

The Manchester Museum is committed to developing ethical, reciprocal and sustainable relationships. In particular we believe that the more rigorous standards that have developed from our relationship with non-UK originating communities, for example indigenous Australians, should be applied across the board to include all human remains no matter what their provenance. Therefore we see no distinction between what have previously been defined as 'contested' or 'uncontested' human remains.

It is well known that there can be no ownership of human remains, only custody. The growing interest in human remains among many communities – who form the audiences and stakeholders of museums – means that the care, interpretation and decisions about use and retention can, ethically, no longer be left simply to the museum, archaeological and scientific communities alone.

The Manchester Museum has in the past unconditionally repatriated indigenous human remains to Australia and New Zealand, and fully recognises the claims of originating communities and descendants in these instances. A more broadly based decision-making process now needs to be put in place for human remains without modern genealogical and cultural descendants, which sees human remains found or stored in a particular area as the collective responsibility of all that area's modern residents. Some groups will inevitably have a greater interest in certain types of human remains, but no one group or individual has any special claim to guardianship of them. Nevertheless it must be acknowledged that the Museum is accountable for the proper care and management of its collection to

the University of Manchester's Board of Governors. Following any consultation the Museum can make a recommendation, for example about repatriation or reburial, but the final decision will lie with the Board of Governors.

At the Manchester Museum we intend to involve, as far as is achievable, all interested groups in the consultation process, including the growing migrant and refugee communities, because we feel it is the right of everyone to feel a connection to the people who lived here before them. Human remains should be treated primarily as the antecedents of all the current residents of the area. The Museum will therefore be pro-active in consulting with a wide range of views over the management of human remains in the collection. This should be seen as a positive approach to social inclusion, enabling people to become more involved in local heritage and collections, and through this to develop an interest in the landscape and identity of their home.

1.0 The Museum and The University

1.1 The Mission of The University of Manchester

“To make The University of Manchester, already an internationally distinguished centre of research, innovation, learning and scholarly inquiry, one of the leading universities of the world by 2015.”

1.2 The Strategic Plan of The University of Manchester

There are nine strategic goals identified in the University’s Strategic Plan, ***Towards Manchester 2015***. The Museum is committed to realizing its potential to play its part in achieving all the University’s corporate goals:

- Goal 1 High international standing
- Goal 2 World class research
- Goal 3 Exemplary knowledge and technology transfer
- Goal 4 Excellent teaching and learning
- Goal 5 Widening participation
- Goal 6 A collegial culture
- Goal 7 Efficient, effective management
- Goal 8 Internationally competitive resources
- Goal 9 More effective community service

1.3 The Mission of The Manchester Museum

The Human Remains Policy is consistent with the mission of the Museum, which states that:

“As a university museum, the Manchester Museum uses its international collection of human and natural history for enjoyment and inspiration, working with people to provoke debate and reflection about the past, present and future of the earth and its inhabitants”

1.4 The Vision of The Manchester Museum

We aim to be the leading university museum in the world by 2010

We will:

- Re-think the role of a global museum in the 21st century by engaging people with the issues of globalisation, post-colonialism, climate change, biodiversity and sustainability

- Be a laboratory for museum practice, reflecting on and disseminating our experience
- Contribute strongly to the teaching and research activities of the university, and to its civilising mission around ethical citizenship and creativity
- Be a fundamental place of reciprocal engagement between the University and the public
- Develop our distinctive role in the cultural life of the region and nation
- Be realistic and ethical in all that we do

2.0 Purpose of the policy

The Manchester Museum (“the Museum”) acknowledges that human remains were once parts of living persons and will care for them in a respectful manner while accepting that what constitutes respect varies from culture to culture. The Museum will make the collection available for research, learning and teaching where appropriate and in appropriate ways. The Museum endorses *Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums* published by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS 2005) and acknowledges the *Guidance for best practice for treatment of human remains excavated from Christian burial grounds in England* published by The Church of England and English Heritage (CoE/EH 2005); in particular paragraph 26:

“...human remains should be treated with respect and reverence: a society that cares for the dead demonstrates that it values life.”

This Policy and its implementation will be managed and monitored by the Human Remains Panel chaired by the Head of Collections Management and including representation from all areas of Museum activity. Any major issues such as use of human remains in display or for disposal will be subject to wide-spread external consultation.

3.0 Definition of human remains

Human remains include the bodies of people who lived thousands of years ago, and of those who have died within recent or living memory. The Museum uses the term human remains to mean the bodies, and parts of bodies, of once living people. These are most commonly regarded as being confined to members of the species *Homo sapiens*. The Museum recognizes that some communities feel a local or ancestral connection to

other ancestors not classified by scientists as *Homo sapiens*. The Museum will respond positively to all requests for consultation over these remains.

The Museum extends the definition of human remains given in the DCMS guidelines to cover osteological material (whole or part skeletons, individual bones or fragments of bone and teeth), ashes, soft tissue including organs and skin, blood, hair, embryos and slide preparations of human tissue.

Human remains also include any of the above which have been modified in some way by human skill and/or may be physically bound-up with other non-human materials to form an artefact composed of several materials.

The definition of human remains excludes casts used for research, teaching and storage but does apply to the interpretation of casts (see below).

4.0 Definition of appropriate communities

The Museum acknowledges the interests of genealogical descendants and cultural communities as defined in DCMS 2005 (page 9 and section 3.3.2), and of the scientific, academic and archaeological communities. However, the Museum also recognises the interests of contemporary adherents of ancient faiths – for example Christians, Jews or Pagans – and local communities from where human remains were excavated, as recognised in CoE/EH 2005 (paragraphs 18, 77 and 86). No one group or individual has any special claim to guardianship of human remains, but some groups will inevitably have a greater interest in certain types of remains. As far as is practical, all interested communities should have an opportunity to be consulted when decisions are taken regarding the management of all human remains, and the Museum will attempt to consult with all known interested parties and will develop a consultation network.

5.0 Description/inventory of holdings

The Museum cannot legally own human remains except where these remains have been treated or altered through the application of skill. However, the Museum recognises the ethical responsibilities invested in it through possession of such remains. The Museum is committed to treating all human remains in an ethical and socially responsible manner.

The Museum holds human remains by virtue of the historic nature of the collection it cares for. The Museum believes in being open about the

contents of the collection and in making information available to all enquiries. The Museum has identified human remains currently stored in the following collection areas: Anthropology, Archaeology, Egyptology, Palaeontology and Zoology

The Museum maintains full details of its holdings in a printable format. All human remains are included in the databases on the Museum's website (www.manchester.ac.uk/museum). This includes the following data:

1. *Numbers of remains*: usually individual items, but may group larger assemblages or series
2. *Physical nature*: for example, whether skeletal, slide preparation, etc., completeness and physical condition
3. *Date*: estimated date or period of death
4. *Provenance*: where the remains originated from, including cultural affiliation if known and any known context of recovery or subsequent history
5. *Status within collection*: whether fully accessioned, and if so the accession number(s), or loan from another institution or individual, and if so the date, period and purpose of the loan

As part of its documentation procedures the Museum will maintain a publicly accessible research register detailing all requests as well as research carried out. This will be stored on the Museum's collection management system and provide a link between the individual items of human remains and the research request. The register will list:

1. Project name
2. Research objectives
3. Research methodology
4. Dates of research
5. Research results
6. Outputs – publications and data holdings

6.0 Consultation and consent

Human remains are not neutral objects; the categories of human remains in the Museum are:

- identifiable human remains claimed by genealogical descendants or those of a comparable status
- human remains claimed by cultural descendants or concerned parties
- human remains unclaimed by genealogical or cultural descendants

In accordance with the Museums Association's *Code of Ethics* the Museum will:

“Respect the interests of originating communities with regard to elements of their cultural heritage present or represented in the museum. Involve originating communities, wherever practical, in decisions about how the museum stores, researches, presents or otherwise uses collections and information about them.”

(Museums Association *Code of Ethics* 2002, 7.5)

Where there is genealogical descent or continuing cultural affiliation, consent of appropriate communities will be sought for any programmes which involve those human remains. The guiding principles for consent are that it is never assumed nor is it granted in perpetuity.

In all other cases, irrespective of biological ancestry, widespread consultation will take place on acquisition, retention, display and reburial. The Museum will be proactive in consulting with communities who may include faith groups active locally, regionally or nationally, academic, scientific, heritage and culture-related community groups and general representatives of the local population. Since these can be contentious issues where there may be no consensus, the Museum retains the right to make final decisions: these will be based on ethical judgement, cultural views on what constitutes respectful treatment, measurable benefits and the needs of different communities.

7.0 Acquisition of human remains

Both because of the rarity of opportunity and – in the case of archaeological remains from the north-west of England – because of the general lack of preservation, the acquisition and permanent retention of human remains by the Museum should be an exceptional circumstance, and based on measurable benefits following widespread consultation. All acquisitions of human remains will be made with reference to the Museum's *Acquisition and Disposal Policy*. The Museum will make the final decision following full and open consultation with appropriate communities, as defined above. This decision will be based upon the benefits of those human remains to the Museum's programmes and communities, as governed by the Museum's *Acquisition and Disposal Policy* and *Guidelines for the Transfer of Archaeological Archives*, and will take into account the wider interests of those consulted.

8.0 Incoming loans

For all incoming loans for display the content, interpretation and marketing of the exhibition will be discussed by the exhibition proposer and the Human Remains Panel.

All incoming loans for research will be subject to the approval of the Human Remains Panel.

Loans of contested or identifiable human remains will only be made after due process of consultation and consent with appropriate communities, as specified above.

9.0 Outgoing Loans

All outgoing loans of human remains will be subject to approval of the Human Remains Panel following approval by the Museum's Loans Panel. Loans of human remains from contemporary originating communities will only be made after due process of consultation and consent with those communities.

10.0 Research, learning and teaching

All requests for teaching and research, including sampling and analysis, must be made by completing the Museum's Human Remains Research, Sampling and Analysis Request Form (Appendix 1).

Where research access is granted the Museum will ensure that all researchers are reminded of the Museum's and their own ethical obligations with regard to human remains and that they are provided with written guidelines and receive appropriate training in handling human remains from the Museum's conservators.

All research samples will be treated as a loan for a fixed period and will be subject to a separate loan agreement. A complete record of the material analysed, the outcome of the analysis, and the resulting research, including copies of all publications, will be returned to the Museum by a specified date. All samples must be returned to the Museum by a specified date. If they are to be altered into a form which the Museum is unable to curate any alternative place of deposit must be agreed upon prior to approval of the request.

Research and sampling of human remains from contemporary originating communities will only be made after due process of consultation and consent with those communities.

The Museum reserves the right to seek external academic advice prior to approving any request for sampling and analysis; such consultation may increase the time before a decision can be made. Research requests will be granted only when the research questions and results are likely to produce measurable benefit.

11.0 Exhibition and display

Where human remains form part of an exhibition, either long or short-term, they will be displayed in a culturally appropriate, sensitive and informative manner and always accompanied by explanatory and contextual interpretation. The Museum commits itself to an ongoing programme of adapting older displays to fit in with these principles.

Display of human remains will only be made after due process of consultation and consent with appropriate communities, as specified above.

Human remains will only be referred to by a proper name where the proper name of an individual is known or the name of a cultural or historical group or archaeological site is to be used. For example, Lindow Man.

The Museum will not display and interpret casts of human remains in ways which would be inappropriate for non-cast human remains.

12.0 Images

All images of human remains in the Museum and on the Museum's website will be in context with appropriate accompanying interpretation.

Access to images of human remains from contemporary originating communities will only be made after due process of consultation with those communities.

All requests for use of images of human remains, or filming within the Museum will be made on the Filming and Photography Request Form and submitted to the Human Remains Panel for approval.

13.0 Storage

The Museum acknowledges that there is no single solution on storage of human remains. Some originating communities specify that human

remains should be stored separately from grave goods and other human remains, while others specify that human remains and contextual material should always be kept together. As an interim measure all human remains will be stored separate from other items in dedicated areas within the Museum, and this will be reviewed at the end of the two-year lifetime of this policy.

All accessioned human remains will be stored in boxes marked with Accession Number and other identification or description as agreed through consultation with appropriate communities, as specified above.

All loaned human remains will be stored in boxes marked with the loan number and other identification or description as agreed through consultation with appropriate individuals.

14.0 Physical access procedures

Requests for physical access to all human remains must be made in writing to the Head of Collections Management and be subject to approval by the Human Remains Panel.

In culturally sensitive circumstances alternative access arrangements can be made.

15.0 Deaccession, repatriation and reburial

The Museum will be proactive in discussing the possible repatriation and reburial of human remains with indigenous originating communities and enter into full consultation with the appropriate claimants, named individuals and next of kin. The Museum commits itself to consideration of and consultation on all other requests which fall outside those narrow definitions. Claims for repatriation and reburial will be determined on a case by case basis following consultation with appropriate communities as defined above.

In keeping with the Museum's *Acquisition and Disposal Policy* and good collections management practice, the Museum will monitor use of human remains with regards to teaching, learning, research and display.

All requests for deaccession, repatriation and reburial must be submitted in writing to the Director of The Manchester Museum. Following widespread consultation with the appropriate communities (see above, Section 4), the Human Remains Panel will make a recommendation to the Director. The final approval for transfer from the Museum's possession is subject to confirmation by the Board of

Governors of The University of Manchester, the Museum's governing body.